

# Portrayal of Disabilities in Caldecott Books

Tina T. Dyches  
Mary Anne Prater  
Jennifer Jenson

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## Abstract

The authors read all of the books that received Caldecott Medal and Honor status awarded between 1938 and 2005 and found that 11 included a character with a disability. For each book, they analyzed characterizations of those with disabilities and generated tips for using the book to teach about disabilities. They argue that accurate portrayals of characters with disabilities, particularly the types of disabilities encountered most frequently by young children, are needed in award-winning picture books.

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## Keywords

Caldecott Award, characterization, character portrayal, picture books, stereotypes

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During the 2000-2001 academic year, at least 6,375,400 students with disabilities attended public schools in the United States, representing approximately 12% of the student population (OSEP, 2002). Most of these students were identified as having specific learning disabilities, speech or language impairments, mental retardation, or emotional disturbance (Office of Special Education Programs [OSEP], 2002). Nearly 10% of students with disabilities are preschool-aged (i.e., 3-5 years old), many having developmental delays or speech/language impairments (OSEP, 2002).

Most students with disabilities are served in general education buildings and classrooms (OSEP, 2002). Thus, children without disabilities are coming in contact with peers with disabilities more than in the past. This changing demographic of America's classrooms necessitates greater awareness and understanding among teachers and students alike.

One teaching tool that may help children who do not have disabilities understand those who do is children's literature. Some evidence supports, for example, that books can help change student attitudes and/or knowledge about disabilities (Bauer, Campbell, & Troxel, 1985; Favazza & Odom, 1997). However, the mere presence in a story of a character with a disability is insufficient. Teachers must consider the literary and artistic quality of these books, since a character with a disability housed in a poorly written story or portrayed with inaccurate illustrations has limited potential to impact readers emotionally and intellectually.

Many awards recognize distinguished children's books, the most widely recognized for picture books being the Randolph Caldecott Medal. This award is given annually to the illustrator of the most distinguished picture

book published in the preceding year. Since this award was established in 1938, 67 picture books have received the medal, and 209 additional books have been acknowledged as Caldecott Honor books, bringing the total number of acknowledged books to 276.

The Caldecott Medal is widely recognized by educators, librarians, parents, and children, and both medal and honor books are available at most libraries. These books have become benchmarks for judging other picture books; they are considered to be high quality resources for reading and teaching experiences.

Caldecott books have been analyzed for representation of gender (Albers, 1996; Crabb & Bielawski, 1994; Davis & McDaniel, 1999; Dellmann-Jenkins, Florjancic, & Swadener, 1993), ethnicity (Albers, 1996; Dellmann-Jenkins, et al., 1993), class (Albers, 1996), and aging (Dellmann-Jenkins & Yang, 1997). However, a search of the literature found no analyses of individuals with disabilities.

Because children's books have the potential to educate others about individuals with disabilities, and because Caldecott books are widely available and respected, we were interested in determining how many Caldecott Medal and Honor Books include prominent characters with disabilities and how these characters are portrayed. We defined disabilities as outlined in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA). Following a report of this analysis, we provide brief summaries and general teaching tips for using these books.

### **Character Analyses**

Our analyses of all Caldecott Honor and Medal books consisted of several steps. First, we searched seven reference books

(Baskin & Harris, 1977; Baskin & Harris, 1984; Blaska, 2003; Dyches & Prater, 2000; McGowan, McGowan, & Wheeler, 1994; Robertson, 1992; Sweeney, 1998) to find references to Caldecott Medal and Honor books that include characters with disabilities. We then read each book in order to find even remote mention of a character with some impairment. However, only characters considered to be an important part of the story were considered in the analysis. At least two readers read each book, and if they disagreed about whether a notable character demonstrated a disability, they met and came to an agreement.

In analyzing characters in these books, we found that some books include main characters who may not have disabilities as described in IDEA 2004, but might be described as being different from others in some way, such as being clumsy (*Mirandy and Brother Wind*), being a troublemaker (*No, David!*), having a minor and temporary impairment (Louis Blériot's use of a crutch in *The Glorious Flight*; Robert Lawson's father who walked with a limp in *They Were Strong and Good*), having a vivid imagination (*Sam, Bangs, & Moonshine*; *Where the Wild Things Are*), being immature for one's age (*King Bidgood's in the Bathtub*), having intense fascination with a subject (*Snowflake Bentley*), or having a label that historically might indicate a possible disability, but no disability was evident in the book (the court jester in *Many Moons*). However, if this uniqueness does not appear to impair the character to the extent that special services would be needed to address the issue (e.g., special education, physical therapy, speech therapy, psychological services), we considered it to be a personality trait rather than a disability. Anthropomorphic characters (e.g., the shadow is described as being blind and mute in *Shadow*)

were excluded from the analysis. Further, characters with known disabilities and who were considered to have a minor role or who have little impact on the plot were not included (the dwarf in *Saint George and the Dragon*; the "old blind hoss" (horse) and the one-eyed "sister" (the moon) in *The Rooster Crows*). After reading all of the Caldecott Medal and Honor books, we found only 11 that included a prominent character with a disability.

In most of these books, the disability is directly relevant to the plot (e.g., *Crow Boy*, *Seven Blind Mice*). However, other portrayals were not relevant to the plot (e.g., dwarfism does not directly impact the story in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*). Also, some of the portrayals of the disabilities are not necessarily accurate (e.g., curing blindness with tears in *Rapunzel*), nor are all portrayals favorable to persons with disabilities (e.g., Peter's accident not only paralyzing his body, but also his spirit in *Tibet: Through the Red Box*). Using the books without guidance may promote misconceptions about disabilities.

While teachers are not likely to choose Caldecott books for the direct purpose of exposing children to characters with disabilities, these books are prominent throughout the United States. The Caldecott award carries sufficient prestige to warrant designated shelves for these books in bookstores and libraries. To help teachers who use Caldecott books that include characters with disabilities, we created teaching ideas so they can provide accurate information about disabilities. Many other high quality books exist which are better suited to teaching about disabilities or that portray individuals with disabilities as integral to the plot. Some of these

Table 1.

Booklists and Annotated Bibliographies
<i>Accept me as I am: Best books of juvenile nonfiction on impairments and disabilities.</i> (Friedberg, Mullins, & Sukiennik, 1985).
<i>Developmental disability in children's literature: Issues and annotated bibliography.</i> (Dyches & Prater, 2000).
<i>More notes from a different drummer.</i> (Baskin & Harris, 1984).
<i>Persons with disabilities: An annotated bibliography of fiction for children and teenagers.</i> (Robertson, 1991).
<i>Understanding abilities, disabilities, and capabilities.</i> (Carline, Laughlin, & Saniga, 1991).
<i>Using children's literature to learn about disabilities and illness, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.</i> (Blaska, 2003).
<i>Voices from the margins: An annotated bibliography of fiction on disabilities and differences for young people.</i> (Ward, 2002).

book lists and analyses of the quality of portrayals of characters with disabilities can be found in Tables 1 and 2.

### Caldecott Books Including Prominent Characters with Disabilities

We now provide a list of the 11 Caldecott books portraying characters with disabilities presented in chronological order from oldest to most recent, including plot summaries, brief analyses of the disabilities, and general teaching tips for each book. While discussion questions and teaching tips are included regarding the disability portrayed in each book, teachers should use these suggestions within the broader context of each book. In doing so, teachers will prevent unnecessary focus and isolation of issues surrounding the disability presented in the book. Further, teachers should follow evidence-based practices in sharing these books with their students (see van Kleeck, Stahl, & Bauer, 2003).

**Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs** by the Brothers Grimm, illustrated and translated by Wanda Gág. Caldecott Honor Book, 1939.

*Plot:* When a beautiful baby girl is born to a young queen, the mother dies and the king remarries. The new queen is jealous of the child and has her taken to the woods to be killed. The seven-year old child, Snow White, is spared her life, and she takes residence in a cottage inhabited by seven dwarfs. The queen learns that Snow White has not been killed and plots to take her life by feeding her a poisoned apple. The dwarfs return home and find Snow White apparently dead. Years later, the servant of a young prince jars her casket, dislodging the piece of the poisonous apple in her throat, and Snow White is revived. She marries the young prince, and they live happily ever after.

Table 2.

Analyses of Characters with Disabilities in Children's Books
Ayala, E. C. (1999). "Poor little things" and "Brave little souls": The portrayal of individuals with disabilities in children's literature. <i>Reading Research and Instruction</i> , 39(1), 103-117.
Carroll, P. S., & Rosenblum, L. P. (2000). Through their eyes: Are characters with visual impairment portrayed realistically in young adult literature? <i>Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy</i> , 43, 620-630.
Dyches, T. T., & Prater, M. A. (2005). Characterization of developmental disabilities in children's fiction. <i>Education and Training in Developmental Disabilities</i> , 40(3), 202-216.
Dyches, T. T., Prater, M. A., & Cramer, S. (2001). Mental retardation and autism in children's books. <i>Education and Training in Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities</i> , 36, 230-243.
Prater, M. A., Johnstun, M., & Munk, J. (2005). From <i>Spaceman</i> to <i>The ADDED Touch</i> : Using juvenile literature to teach about attention deficit disorder. <i>TEACHING Exceptional Children Plus</i> , 1(4) Article 4. <a href="http://escholarship.bc.edu/education/tecplus/vol/iss4/4">http://escholarship.bc.edu/education/tecplus/vol/iss4/4</a>
Prater, M. A. (2003). Learning disabilities in children's and adolescent literature: How are characters portrayed? <i>Learning Disability Quarterly</i> , 26, 47-62.
Prater, M. A. (2000). Using juvenile literature that portrays characters with disabilities in your classroom. <i>Intervention in School and Clinic</i> , 35, 167-176.
Prater, M. A. (1999). Characterization of mental retardation in children and young adult literature. <i>Education and Training in Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities</i> , 34, 418-431.
Prater, M. A., & Sileo, N. M. (2001). Juvenile literature that addresses HIV/AIDS: Ideas and precautions for the classroom. <i>TEACHING Exceptional Children</i> , 33(6), 34-45.
Smith-D'Arezzo, W. M. (2003). Diversity in children's literature: Not just a black and white issue. <i>Children's Literature in Education</i> , 34(1), 75-94.

*Disability analysis:* The seven men who live in the cottage in the woods have dwarfism, a medical or genetic condition characterized by disproportionate short stature, often accompanied with a bone disorder. While many people with dwarfism have normal intelligence, normal life spans, and reasonably good health, dwarfism is considered a disability under the Americans with Disabilities Act ([http://www.lpaonline.org/resources\\_faq.html](http://www.lpaonline.org/resources_faq.html)), and students with dwarfism may need physical therapy or other special serv-

ices in order to successfully participate in school activities.

The seven dwarfs in this story are depicted as friendly, kind, and hard-working miners who adore Snow White. They are illustrated as gnome-like, with tall, cone-shaped hats and waist-long beards. This fairy tale depiction resembles other characterizations of people with dwarfism, such as elves, fairies, leprechauns, nymphs, pixies, pygmies, and munchkins. Such characterizations are rampant in children's literature; unfortunately,

they stereotype people with dwarfism into these roles.

*Teaching tips:* Dispel some of the myths about dwarfism by discussing the following questions:

- What are the differences between these terms: dwarf, little people, and midget?
- What books or movies include characters with dwarfism? What are some common portrayals of these characters?
- How might someone with dwarfism have difficulty accessing important functions in the community (e.g., ATM machines, contact sports, library book shelves)? What can be done to alleviate these barriers?
- How would the plot be different or the same if the men in the woods did not have dwarfism?

**The Steadfast Tin Soldier** by Hans Christian Anderson, illustrated by Marcia Brown. Caldecott Honor Book, 1954.

*Plot:* When a young boy gets a set of tin soldiers for his birthday, he notices that one is missing a leg. After the boy's family goes to sleep, the birthday toys come to life, and the tin soldier sees a beautiful toy dancer who appears to also have only one leg. The tin soldier falls in love, experiences several frightening adventures, and is eventually returned to the young boy's home. The tin soldier is discarded into the fire, and a gust of wind carries the dancer into the flames. They are consumed together, leaving only a charred bangle from her dress and a heart-shaped lump of tin.

*Disability analysis:* The tin soldier would be considered to have an orthopedic impairment -- a missing leg. His disability is

not addressed in depth, but it is important to the plot because he falls in love with a dancer who appears to have a similar condition. During his adventures, the emphasis is placed on his steadfast behavior as a soldier, not on the fact that he is missing a leg.

*Teaching tip:* Discuss how first impressions influence our relationships with others. Suggested questions:

- What is a "first impression"? What was the tin soldier's first impression of the ballet dancer? Was this impression accurate? Did he ever learn the truth about the dancer?
- Do your friends look like you? In which ways are you alike/different?
- How can you be loyal to someone who is different from you in some way?

**Crow Boy** written and illustrated by Taro Yashima. Caldecott Honor Book, 1956.

*Plot:* Chibi ("tiny boy") is found underneath the school floor on the first day of school, afraid of his teacher and the other students. His classmates think that he can not learn, and he does not play with them. He sits at his desk and looks at things which do not interest others, such as the ceiling and the top of his desk. After Chibi has been in school several years, his sixth grade teacher notices his unique gifts of observation and invites Chibi to perform in the talent show, imitating various voices of crows. His talent amazes his classmates and adults, who feel that they have treated him poorly. From that point forward they call him Crow Boy, and his faint smile reveals that Chibi likes his new name.

*Disability analysis:* Although no disability is mentioned, Chibi demonstrates

many characteristics of autism. He has difficulty with communication -- not once does he speak a word -- but he can echo the sounds of crows perfectly. His social skills are also impaired: he has no friends, isolates himself from others, and is afraid of his teacher and classmates. He also exhibits a repertoire of unusual behaviors: he is fascinated by visual details, appears to hear different sounds from great distances, holds and watches insects that others fear, and brings the same lunch to school every day. He also displays uneven patterns of development: while his social and communication skills are poor, he has a strong sense of place, knows about flowers, and has strengths in drawing and handwriting.

*Teaching tip:* Discuss how everyone has unique gifts and talents. Suggested questions:

- What are three of your strengths? What is difficult for you?
- What are Chibi's strengths? What is difficult for Chibi?
- How could having a boy like Chibi in your class help you discover your own talents?

**Mr. Penny's Race Horse** written and illustrated by Marie Hall Ets. Caldecott Honor, 1957.

*Plot:* Mr. Penny enters his animals in the fair, except for Limpy the horse. The animals are promised prizes and a ride on the Ferris wheel if they win. When Limpy sees the horses racing on the track, he and Slop the goat join the race. With cheering people in the grandstands, the director of the fair asks Mr. Penny and his animals to stay at the fair and put on a show the next few days, and the animals get a ride on the Ferris wheel.

*Disability analysis:* Limpy is an "old and knobby" horse with a lame leg. He likes wearing a bandage on this leg because it makes him look like a race horse. He is not satisfied being a farm horse and wishes to be treated like other horses, particularly race horses. After entertaining the crowd, Limpy lifts his lame leg to prove that while he may be perceived as being incompetent, he is able to contribute to others' happiness.

*Teaching Tip:* Discuss the phrase, "Act as if you are, and that you will become."

- Why did Limpy like to wear a bandage on his leg? How might a bandage symbolize both inability and ability?
- Did Limpy become like a race horse? How?
- Is it possible to achieve what we believe? What happens if we don't believe we can achieve something?

**The Fool of the World and the Flying Ship** retold by Arthur Ransome, illustrated by Uri Shulevitz. Caldecott Medal Winner, 1969.

*Plot:* The "Fool of the World" is a young peasant who has two "clever" brothers whom their parents favor, and the Fool is, in large part, neglected and mistreated. When the Czar sends a message that he will give his daughter in marriage to anyone who brings him a flying ship, the Fool decides to find a flying ship. As he travels, he comes across a magical man who tells the Fool how to get a flying ship, with the condition that the Fool must pick up every passenger he sees along the way. Traveling to the Czar's palace, he picks up many men who have different talents. When they arrive at the palace, the Czar sees that they are commoners and does not



want his daughter to wed a commoner, so he tells the Fool to accomplish a number of seemingly impossible tasks. With the help of his passengers, the Fool completes all of the tasks, and the Czar gives his daughter to the Fool to wed. The Czar and the Czaritza are impressed with the Fool, the Princess falls in love with him, and they marry.

*Disability analysis:* Historically, a “fool” of a village was considered to be one who was “feeble-minded,” “simple-minded,” or an “idiot” (describing a level of mental retardation) (Scheerenberger, 1983). The Fool in this story has a few representative characteristics of mental retardation. For example, he is described as being “as simple as a child, simpler than some children, and he never did anyone a harm in his life”; his mother says that he is a “stupid fellow” who could not care for himself.

*Teaching tip:* Discuss how simplicity enhances lives of those who live simply.

- Play the Shaker song “Simple Gifts,” and read the book of the same title by Chris Raschka. Is simplicity really a gift? Was the simplicity of the “Fool of the World” a gift to him? How?
- What does it mean to “come down where we ought to be”? Who in the story was able to come down from a level of complexity to a level of simplicity? How?
- What is the opposite of simple? Can something be simple and complex at the same time?
- Do children live simply? Do individuals with mental retardation live simply? How can societal expectations, judgments, and standards diminish our capacity for living simply?

**Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs** by the Brothers Grimm, translated by Randall Jarrell, illustrated by Nancy Ekholm Burkert. Caldecott Honor, 1973.

*Plot:* Snow White is a beautiful young child, envied by her stepmother, who sends her to the forest with a huntsman to be killed. The huntsman has pity on Snow White and lets her run free. She encounters seven dwarfs and lives with them as their housekeeper until the jealous stepmother poisons her with an apple. The dwarfs allow a king’s son to take Snow White away in her coffin, and when it is jarred, she awakens and marries the prince.

*Disability analysis:* The seven men have dwarfism, a physical condition which is portrayed realistically in the illustrations. In contrast to the little men, Snow White is portrayed as long, sleek, and beautiful. This depiction is pervasive throughout the story, even when Snow White was a seven-year-old child.

*Teaching tips:* Explore the concept of inclusion of diverse people by discussing the following questions:

- Why do you think seven dwarfs are living outside of the community? Do you think it is by choice, or might they have been shunned?
- Was there a time in history when people who were different were forced to live outside the city limits?
- Do we ever refuse to allow others to join our group just because they are different?

**Duffy and the Devil** retold by Harve Zemach, illustrated by Margot Zemach. Caldecott Medal, 1974.

*Plot:* When housekeeper Old Jone's eyesight fades, Squire Lovel of Trove hires a maid, Duffy, to help Old Jone. Duffy fails the first tasks of spinning and knitting, so she makes a deal with the devil to knit the squire's stockings. In return, Duffy must guess the devil's name. Duffy tells Old Jone of her deception, and they devise a plan to figure out the devil's name. When the devil comes to snatch Duffy away, she tells him his name, and he disappears. At the same moment, all of his knitting disappears, leaving Squire Lovel of Trove stark naked. Duffy exclaims that since all of her work has gone up in ashes, she will never knit another garment.

*Disability analysis:* Old Jone begins to lose her vision, likely due to conditions related to old age. She can no longer complete chores that require sharp eyesight, which means that Squire Lovel must hire a younger housekeeper. Old Jone is illustrated wearing eyeglasses throughout the book.

*Teaching tip:* Discuss with the class how people see and how vision works.

- Why can age sometimes make your vision worse?
- How do you think it would feel to suddenly lose your vision? How might your feelings differ from having a slow loss of vision?
- Choose a member of the class to be blindfolded and try to find his/her way around the classroom. Have the child discuss how this made them feel.
- Have all members try to write a sentence with their eyes closed. Have them discuss how they felt during the process.

**Seven Blind Mice** written and illustrated by Ed Young. Caldecott Honor Book, 1993.

*Plot:* Seven blind mice encounter an object they cannot identify. One by one each mouse investigates an aspect of the object, and each mouse assigns an inadequate and incorrect label to the "something" they encounter: a pillar, a snake, a cliff, a spear, a fan, and a rope. When the final mouse explores every part of the object, she puts all the pieces together and identifies it as an elephant.

*Disability analysis:* The seven mice are depicted as blind, and they use their other senses to learn about their environment. Blindness seems to be used as a metaphor for barriers people place on themselves. The final mouse did not let this barrier keep her from conducting a thorough investigation of the object before her, and she gained wisdom from "seeing" the whole picture.

*Teaching tip:* Teach the concept of multiple perspectives. Place a blindfold on seven students who will be the "seven blind mice." Have the students use only the sense of touch to reveal the true identity of a large object placed before them. Permit each student to touch only one part of the item. Have the first six students whisper to the teacher what they think the object is. Write these answers on the board. Then allow the seventh student to touch the whole object, explore it in depth, and tell the class what he/she thinks it is.

Discuss how limiting access to knowledge affects perceptions. Suggested questions:

- Why did our "seven blind mice" make such different guesses?

- Whose guess was most correct? Why?
- Can you give an example of when you have felt like you don't have all the information you need in order to understand something?
- How can blindness be a strength? How can you overcome your personal weaknesses?

**Starry Messenger** written and illustrated by Peter Sís. Caldecott Honor Book, 1997.

*Plot:* Using a telescope to map the heavens, Galileo Galilei made many miraculous discoveries, including the fact that the earth is not the center of the universe. While many people marveled at his discoveries and applauded him, the Church did not approve of Galileo's challenges to tradition and, they thought, to the Bible. Galileo was tried in the Pope's court and sentenced to house arrest for the remainder of his life. Although Galileo became blind and later died, his ideas lived on.

*Disability analysis:* Galileo's blindness is mentioned only once, at the end of the story when he is an old man. Vision, however, is an important theme in the book. There were stars in Galileo's eyes, even from birth. When he was ordered to stop believing what he could actually see, the people could see that the "stars had left his eyes." Yet even though imprisoned in his home, Galileo could not be prevented from thinking of the wonders of the universe.

*Teaching tip:* Teach the students the power of visualizing and of reaching their dreams. Have the students close their eyes and picture in their minds the sun, moon, stars, Earth, Saturn, and Mars. Then have

them visualize themselves at their current age. Guide them to see the color of their hair, eyes, and skin; the clothes they are wearing; the games they like to play; and the activities they engage in with their families. Then guide them to visualize themselves 10 years from now. Explore their experiences with the following questions:

- Could you see the heavens like Galileo could?
- Are the stars, moon, and sun still in the sky even when you can't see them with your eyes?
- Could you visualize yourself today?
- In your mind's eye, what will you be like in 10 years?
- How can you make sure nobody stops you from fulfilling your vision of your future?

**Rapunzel** by the Brothers Grimm, adapted and illustrated by Paul Zelinsky. Caldecott Medal Winner, 1998.

*Plot:* A young mother-to-be craves an herb from a neighboring garden. When her husband is caught stealing the herb, the gardener, a sorceress, demands her child in return. The child, named Rapunzel, is imprisoned for life in a tower without doors, where she grows up sheltered from the outside world. Eventually a young prince discovers how to enter the tower, and they marry. When the sorceress learns of their romance, she banishes Rapunzel to the wilderness, and tricks the prince into climbing the tower and causes him to fall, which blinds him. When the lovers find each other, Rapunzel's tears of pity and love fall on the prince's eyes and he regains his vision.

*Disability analysis:* Blindness is tem-

porary in this folk tale. The prince is depicted holding a cane and stretching out his arm to feel his way. It is only after he is miraculously healed from blindness by Rapunzel's tears that the prince knows where he is and is able to find his way home.

*Teaching tip:* While this picture book may be enjoyed by young children, its depth and complexity may only be appreciated by experienced readers. Discussion for juveniles and young adults could explore the following themes:

- Have you ever craved something so much that you were willing to do almost anything to get it, even if the consequences would be horrible? How did you feel after you satisfied your craving? How do you think the husband felt when he decided to give the sorceress his newborn child in exchange for some rapunzel from her garden?
- What is the difference between romantic love and parental love? How was each type of love expressed by the characters in the story (e.g., the mother and father's love for their daughter, the sorceress' love for Rapunzel, the prince's love for Rapunzel, Rapunzel's love for the prince)?
- Could a terrible fall cause blindness? Why/why not? How was the prince's vision restored? What treatments are available today to help restore some sight to those with vision impairments? How effective are these treatments?

**Tibet: Through the Red Box** written and illustrated by Peter Sís. Caldecott Honor Book, 1999.

*Plot:* When Peter Sís' father calls him

home to Prague, Peter rediscovers stories told during his childhood from his father's red lacquered box. Inside the box are remnants of the time his father, Vladimir, spent in China and Tibet in the 1950s: diary entries, drawings, beads, buttons, and stones. This box evokes many memories for Peter, who heard his father tell the stories when Peter was a young boy recovering from a paralyzing accident.

A noted filmmaker, Vladimir had gone to China to make films and to teach documentary filmmaking. He became lost and traveled through Tibet for 14 months, experiencing a fantastic odyssey of mystical proportions. He grew to love the magic of the land and people. Hearing these extravagant stories through his father's journal, which he kept in a red box, helped Peter recover the use of his arms and legs.

*Disability analysis:* While his father was away, Peter jumped from a high garden wall and was paralyzed. After returning, Peter's father told him all the stories about Tibet while Peter was confined to bed. The paralysis, however, was temporary; Peter regained the feeling in his arms and legs and was able to walk again. Peter's disability appears to be symbolic of his loneliness for his father.

*Teaching tip:* This book can be appreciated differently by various audiences, with opaque messages intended for more advanced learners. Discussions with advanced students may be centered around these questions:

- What is the significance of the "high, safe wall" that surrounded the garden where Peter and his father played? (This also is the wall from which Peter jumped and was paralyzed.)
- What type of disability do you think Peter has? How is he cured from this disability?
- What is the difference between paraple-

gia, quadriplegia, and hemiplegia?

- What is stem-cell research? What is the promise of stem-cell research to those with orthopedic impairments?

## Conclusion

Books that have been designated as Caldecott Medal and Honor books are recognized for their quality of illustrations; their depiction of individuals with disabilities is not a factor in their selection. Our analysis of the Caldecott Medal and Honor books indicates that these books fall short in at least four ways:

1. The number of books featuring individuals with disabilities is far below the proportion in which students with disabilities are represented in American schools.
2. The types of disabilities portrayed are not those which young children are most likely to encounter.
3. The characters with disabilities are unlike people with disabilities with whom young children are likely to associate.
4. Some of the portrayals of the characters with disabilities are inaccurate.

Although Caldecott books portray a variety of cultures and ethnicities (Brown, 2001; Dellmann-Jenkins, et al., 1993; Outz & Calvert, 1996), few portray individuals with disabilities, particularly children with disabilities. Given that approximately 12% of the students in public schools have a disability, we were surprised that only 4% of Caldecott Medal and Honor Books include a character with a disability. This underrepresentation is even greater than the underrepresentation of female characters in Caldecott award-winning books (Albers, 1996; Davis & McDaniel,

1999).

The disabilities portrayed in these books are not necessarily the types children will encounter in their daily lives at school and in the community. The majority of school-aged children with disabilities have specific learning disabilities; however, not one of the books we reviewed included a character with a learning disability. Similarly, the majority of preschoolers with disabilities have speech or language impairments, and this disability was not portrayed in any of the books we reviewed. Of the four disabilities that were portrayed (orthopedic impairments, autism, mental retardation, and visual impairments), only mental retardation is considered to be a high incidence disability. Nondisabled classmates are more likely to interact with students with mental retardation than they are with students who have the other disabilities portrayed in these books. However, the depiction of the character with mental retardation is unrealistic (*The Fool of the World and the Flying Ship*), because at the end of the tale he is magically cured from his simple mindedness and becomes highly respected by the people.

Young readers may have difficulty relating to the characters with disabilities portrayed in these books because they are unlike people with disabilities with whom they interact at school or in the community, due to reasons other than the disability. For example, one of the six books portrayed a blind scientist who lived many years ago (Galileo in *Starry Messenger*). Seven of the books were folk tales (both versions of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, *Duffy and the Devil*, *The Fool of the World and the Flying Ship*, *The Steadfast Tin Soldier*, *Rapunzel*, and *Seven Blind Mice*), not realistic stories to be literally applied. Two of the books used animals (*Mr. Penny's Race Horse* and *Seven Blind Mice*),

and another used toys to depict a disability (*The Steadfast Tin Soldier*). In two books, the disability may have developed as part of the aging process (*Duffy and the Devil* and *Starry Messenger*), and in only two books were the characters with special needs depicted as children (*Crow Boy* and *Tibet: Through the Red Box*).

Finally, inaccurate portrayals of disabilities were included in some of the books. For example, in three books the disability was temporary (*The Fool of the World and the Flying Ship*, *Rapunzel*, and *Tibet: Through the Red Box*), and miraculous cures occurred (*The Fool of the World and the Flying Ship*, *Rapunzel*, and *Tibet: Through the Red Box*).

One Caldecott medal winner includes a well-known role model with an orthopedic impairment, but this book was not considered in this evaluation, because the character is not depicted as having a disability (*So You Want to Be President?* Caldecott Medal, 2001). Depicting Franklin D. Roosevelt without his wheelchair (in a standard chair or with only his head and torso showing), may have been in response to an agreement he had with the press that they would not photograph his wheelchair or otherwise make him appear to be frail. The author of the book writes, "Every President was different from every other and yet no woman has been President. No person of color has been President. No person who wasn't a Protestant or a Roman Catholic has been President" (St. George, 2000, p. 12). We regret that the author missed this opportunity to teach readers that individuals with disabilities can make great contributions to society, even serving as President of the United States.

Caldecott Medal and Honor books are not a representative sample of picture books written for children. The fact that few of them portray individuals with disabilities may not

be alarming. In context with other research, however, it becomes apparent that few picture books portray disabilities at all. In one study of highly recommended children's books, 48 were found to portray a disability, but only two of those were picture books (4%) (Prater, 2000). Another study discovered only 8 of 90 children's books (8.9%) that portray learning disabilities were picture books (Prater, 2003), and 23 of 68 (19%) characterizing mental retardation were picture books (Prater, 1999).

Since U.S. schools are serving increasingly diverse student populations, there is a great need for more authors to write and publishers to print picture books -- particularly high quality, award-winning books -- that accurately portray children who experience a wide variety of life circumstances, including disabilities. Caldecott Honor and Medal books that include accurate depictions of characters with disabilities have potential to shape children's socialization with those who may be unlike themselves, and such books may help children with disabilities to normalize their situation. Teachers who use Caldecott books in the classroom have an obligation to ensure that misconceptions and stereotypes are not promoted, but are exposed and corrected.

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***About the authors:***

Tina Taylor Dyches is associate professor and Coordinator of Special Education Programs at Brigham Young University.

Mary Anne Prater is professor and Chairperson of the Department of Counseling Psychology and Special Education at Brigham Young University.

Jennifer Jenson recently graduated from Brigham Young University with a B.S. in Elementary Education and teaches third grade in Provo School District.